

University of Rhode Island DigitalCommons@URI

National Museum Act Program (1973-1974)

Education: National Endowment for the Arts and
Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996)

1973

National Museum Act Program (1973-1974): Speech 01

Otto Wittmann

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_68

Recommended Citation

Wittmann, Otto, "National Museum Act Program (1973-1974): Speech 01" (1973). *National Museum Act Program (1973-1974)*. Paper 6.
http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_68/6

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Education: National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996) at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in National Museum Act Program (1973-1974) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

A Statement
Before the Special Sub-Committee on Arts and Humanities
of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare
Thursday, July 19, 1973 by

OTTO WITTMANN

Chairman, Legislative Committee, Association of Art Museum Directors
Vice-President, American Association of Museums
Director, The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio

Mr. Chairman and members of the Special Sub-Committee on Arts and Humanities of the Senate, I am testifying today on behalf of the Association of Art Museum Directors, a national association of the directors of the leading major art museums of the United States. I am Chairman of the Legislative Committee of that organization, as well as a Vice-president of the American Association of Museums and the Director of The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio.

Although I have testified before you many times during the past decade concerning the growth and services of museums, I will confine my remarks today to art museums, as there are several other colleagues here to testify on behalf of other kinds of museums.

As a preface to my remarks today, I want to pay tribute to the far-sighted, effective and thoughtful support that you, Senator Pell, and your colleagues in both the Senate

and the House have given to the arts in the United States. We have come a long way in the relatively few years since I first appeared before a special Sub-committee on the Arts of which you were Chairmen, in October 1963, to consider the need for national support of the arts.

At that time, testifying on behalf of the American Association of Museums, I commented on the need of American Museums for sufficient funds for research, for conservation of the objects in our care, for training of professional museum personnel and for museum educational programs. I also reported at that time that the American Association of Museums estimated that it had approximately 3,000 members in the United States and that annual attendance at all American Museums was approximately 200 million. I don't know how accurate our figures were at that time, but you will hear other testimony today which will indicate the enormous growth in attendance which has taken place since that testimony ten years ago.

Your interest and support came at exactly the right time. Your bill of ten years ago, together with a similar House bill, to establish a United States National Arts Foundation and a National Council for the Arts, which the museums of America supported then and have continued to support, resulted in the establishment of the National Endowments for the Arts and for the Humanities. President Johnson signed

the bill on September 3, 1964, appointed the original members of the National Council on the Arts on February 23, 1965 and the Council held its first meeting at the White House, April 9, 1965. I had the honor to be among those Council members initially appointed by the President.

Those early meetings of the National Council on the Arts were exciting, challenging and sometimes difficult as we forged programs to implement the policies established by the bill. There were times in those early days when it seemed that the other arts of the theater, cinema and music, would completely dominate the program - and that museums, which admittedly served larger numbers of Americans through their vast and growing attendance and their varied programs of education and exhibition, would be neglected. Indeed there was a serious question as to whether the relatively meager funds appropriated in those early days should be used for any programs except those which would benefit the creative or performing artists.

Certainly there is still a great and valid need to support and encourage the creators of the Arts if we are to mature as a great nation. It is a specific responsibility of the National Endowment for the Arts to do this - and it is being effectively implemented by the present members of the National Council on the Arts under the able and imaginative leadership of Nancy Hanks. It is encouraging to all of us that the Congress has re-authorized the National Endowments for the Arts and for the Humanities and that Congress has

authorized increased funding for future operations. We strongly support full appropriation of these funds so that the Arts can continue to survive in these times of growing needs and increased costs due to inflation.

You and your colleagues in the Senate and the House initiated a new era of support for the development of American culture with the bill of less than a decade ago to establish the National Endowments. Your initial and continuing support should be recognized, applauded and encouraged by all who have an interest in the culture of our country. We are glad to be able to have this belated opportunity to express our endorsement and appreciation as we were not invited to testify earlier this year on the re-authorization of the National Endowments for the Arts and for the Humanities.

* * * * *

In the few years since the initial programs of the Endowments were established, we have seen great changes both in the identification of the growing needs of museums and in the response to those needs by the Endowments. The National Endowment for the Arts has for instance been particularly responsive to Museums' needs in developing programs to train conservators to care for the objects museums hold in trust, to provide professional training for new museum personnel, to provide funds for special exhibitions and for acquisitions

of works of art by living American artists. It has also responded to the need for better air-conditioning and climate controls in older museum buildings. It has offered these programs to all museums whether in the fields of art, science, history or industry. These innovative programs, and others offered by the National Endowment for the Humanities, have been of great assistance in enabling American museums better to serve the ever-increasing number of citizens which visit them.

However, the plight of American museums has become worse, not better, in the past decade. As the public makes increasing use of museums, as the museums' programs expand to serve these public demands, operating costs have risen and deficits grown. It seems that the more successful we are in terms of public service, the higher our costs. The museums of the United States find themselves, for the most part, in desperate straits, insufficiently funded to carry on their existing services and programs, certainly financially unable to innovate many needed new concepts, harrassed by inflation unaccompanied by any way to compensate for increased costs through increased prices. While I speak today on behalf of art museums, I am sure you will hear similar statements from representatives of other kinds of museums.

Our greatest need today is to find sufficient financial support to maintain existing museums and to continue existing programs already serving the cultural needs of our citizens.

Museums are regarded today as important educational institutions and active cultural centers. American museums, unlike many of their European counterparts, have traditionally provided the public with educational programs and facilities (in addition to their collections) which clearly define and substantiate the broad interpretation they have chosen to make of their civic responsibility.

If I may speak for a moment about my own institution, The Toledo Museum of Art, which is some ways typical of American art museums: we must constantly seek funds to carry on the needed expansion of our continuing programs. Our operating expenses have increased 110% in the past decade. In 1963 our operating expenses were \$685,000. In 1973 they will be \$1,440,000.

Since the founding of Toledo's Museum in 1901, we have been pioneers in art and music education programs; and still operate today what is probably the largest museum program in art education in the world. Our art collection has more than doubled since I joined the museum in 1946. With this growth, has come the serious obligation to care for and preserve these works of art so that not only our generation but generations to come may enjoy and learn from them.

Our museum building was completed in 1933. It is old and would be obsolete had we not constantly improved it. For example, we installed year-round air-conditioning and climate control to preserve the works of art (and only incidentally for visitor comfort). We had to renovate an

old building, find new gallery space for the increasing collections, expand as we could old facilities to serve today's needs. What we have done to upgrade our programs, to care for our works of art, to rejuvenate an old building are typical of many art museums across the United States. Our efforts to serve our community in the fields of art and music continue to be successful and to grow; but this growth, compounded by inflationary costs, must be supported by increased income if museums are to survive as viable and needed educational institutions.

Traditionally, American museums have been primarily supported by private endowment and contributions from private sources. Such endowments and private funding will continue to play an important and significant role in museum finances. It is also important to encourage continuing private contributions to non-profit public and private museums through gifts made possible by existing taxation encouragements. However, such private funds will in most instances not be sufficient to sustain the growing demand for museum services. Public funding will be a necessity for the continuing vitality of American museums in the near future - and absolutely imperative from any long-range point of view.

The Association of Art Museum Directors therefore supports enthusiastically any program which will aid American art museums to accomplish their mission of community service. The needs which I identified in my 1963 testimony for you:

research, conservation, training and education are still valid needs. There are now many more, principally in the area of maintenance of existing museums and existing programs. For these reasons we specifically support the Senate bill S 796, the Museum Services Act, which seems to us to offer support to on-going programs in established Museums.

We also support and endorse the innovative programs of the National Endowment for the Arts and for the Humanities, as they relate to all museums. We feel that the programs are not in conflict. Continuation of existing institutions and educational programs is vitally necessary to the success of any additional innovative programs. Both continuity and innovation are necessary, and one cannot exist without the other. Art cannot exist without an audience. The creative artist cannot express his concepts visually without a place to exhibit his work. Museums offer background for education and cultural experience for everyone; as well as a forum for creative artists to exhibit their art.

Surely the programs proposed by the Museum Services Act as well as the programs related to museums offered by the National Endowments are both needed for the cultural well-being of our country. Surely these programs complement one another, and each would serve to strengthen the other.

Who will benefit most from the interrelationship of these programs? Not merely the museums nor the artists, but most of all, the millions of citizens of our country

who feel a real need for greater cultural and spiritual dimensions in their lives today.

We live in an age of skepticism, a time in which our values are shaken by many forces we scarcely understand. At times it seems that the forces of evil will overwhelm what constructive forces for good still exist. However, if we allow the works of art to speak, some of which go back 4,000 years before the birth of Christ, they will confirm man's ability to triumph over evil no matter how serious it may seem. Time and again the evidence of art is that man's spirit rises above adversity to create anew and to reaffirm the basic values of life which can and must be continued. Museums, indeed, face a challenging task in the years ahead.